

THESES

Concerning the true Way of

Reforming Churches,

Or for calling a

SYNOD.

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26-10

By a Reverend Divine.



L O N D O N,

Printed by H. B. for H. Everſden, at the Sign of
the Greyhound in St. Pauls Church-yard.

THESES

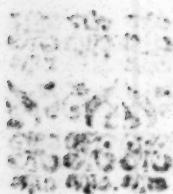
Concerning the cross

Reforming Churches

Of calling

SYNOD

By a Reverend Divine



Printed by H. B. for H. B. at the Sign of
the Green in St. Paul's Church-yard, 1688.

SOME
THESES
 Concerning the true Way of
 Reforming Churches.

1. **A**LL men desire to live, and to live happily, and eternally. And therefore all men (unless they be Epicures, and wholly debauched) desire to know the way whereby they may come to an eternal and happy life.

2. All men since *Adam's* fall, whatever wit, or prudence, or knowledge they have in matters humane, yet are they blind in those things that concern the knowledge of God, and so, that concern the knowledge of eternall life, and the way unto it; according to that of the Apostle, *The naturall man receives not the things of the spirit of God.* And they are lyars, according to that of *David, All men are lyars:* And therefore men that are onely led by their own wisdom, and prudence, cannot truly or rightly determine any thing concerning the way to eternal life, or concerning Religion.

3. God alone not onely knows which is the sure way to eternal life, but also hath discovered and revealed it to the world in his Word, partly by his Prophets, partly by his Son made Man, and partly by his Apostles. This way therefore, i.e. true Religion can and ought only to be learnt from the Word of God preached to men by his Prophets, his Son, and his Apostles.

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4. That that is the certain Word of God which is contained in the canonical Scriptures, i. e. whatever is either there related, commanded, or permitted in the Name of God, or belongs to his Commands, Promises, and Gospel, is a thing out of controverſie among all Chriſtians. And therefore to think and determine concerning Religion, according to the Word of God contained in the canonical Scriptures, is moſt ſafe, and ſecure.

5. Moreover, whatever is either in the Roman or other Churches, it is, either according to the Word of God contained and declared in thoſe canonical Scriptures, or it is contrary to the Word of God, or it is neither according nor contrary to the Word of God, but an indifferent thing.

Three things follow hence :

1. Whatſoever therefore is acknowledged to be according to the Word of God contained in the canonical Scriptures, if it be found either in the Roman or any other Church, is to be retained, and if it be baniſhed out of them, it is to be brought in again.

2. On the other ſide ; whatever is acknowledged to be contrary to the Word of God, if it have no place already in the Church, it is not to be introduced. If it be in the Church, it is to be wholly removed.

3. Whatever is acknowledged to be neither according nor contrary to the Word of God, viz. what is *adiaphorons* ; in the firſt place it ought to be declared that it is indifferent, i. e. that it is ſuch a thing as is not *per ſe* neceſſary to ſalvation, and therefore a thing whereby no mans conſcience can or ought to be bound *per ſe*. And then the Apoſtles rule is to be obſerved, namely, that *nothing is to be retained in, or brought into the Church, which makes not to edification, to order and to decency*. Ceremonies therefore, and all indifferents, are to be permitted free to each Church, that every Church may keep thoſe that it judges, will be for the edification, decency and order of the people. But yet they are ſo to be permitted free, that as much as may be, ancient ones be alway rather retained then new ones introduced, and that both for the honour of Antiquity, and alſo becauſe in the Church of God, by how much the more ancient any thing is, by ſo much the more true it is, and therefore the better according to *Tertullian's* rule.

6. It cannot be any way demonſtrated, that beſides the canonical Scriptures there is any other Doctrine then the Word of God ; and therefore that the things commanded in that Doctrine are neceſſary to ſalvation : But either to introduce any thing into, or being introduced, to

to retain any thing in the Church, as necessary to salvation, of which you are not certain whether it be according to the Word of God or no, is a sin, according to that of the Apostle, *Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.* Nothing that has not therefore its testimony from the holy Scriptures is to be introduced into the Church as necessary to salvation, or being introduced to be retain'd, as not onely the holy Scriptures, but also the Fathers themselves teach. For although as well the Prophets as Christ and his Apostles, did preach many things more then are contained in the Bible, yet all things that are wholly necessary to salvation, are abundantly handled in the Bible, as both the Bible teaches, and the Fathers themselves witness.

7. The Canonical Scriptures are obscure indeed in many places, and their obscurity is sometimes in the very words, sometimes in the matter, sometimes in both together; for which cause the knowledge both of the Tongues, and of History, is necessary to the understanding of the Scriptures; yet none, especially of those things that are necessary either to be believed or done to salvation, is so obscure in some places of Scripture, but it is also elsewhere in the same Scriptures most plainly and perspicuously found written: As also *Augustine* has diligently observed, and wisely taught, in his Books *De Doctrina Christiana*: Nothing therefore is to be determined concerning Religion, and to be propounded to the people, as necessary to salvation, which hath not some certain and clear testimony in the Canonickall Scriptures; that which all the Fathers also have taught; for that is in truth the language of an Orthodox man in *Theodoret* his *Answer* against an Heretique, 'Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τὸν κύριον διὰ τὴν ἀποκατάστασιν. I trust onely to the holy Scriptures. Wherefore no opinion can or ought to be drawn from the obscure places of Scripture, unlesse they be first illustrated and conformed by other more clear places of Scripture.

8. Whatsoever things are read without the Scriptures, either in the Fathers, or Councils, or Decrees of Popes, they are either consonant to, or dissonant from the Word of God, or neither consonant nor dissonant; such things therefore as are consonant are to be retain'd, but what are dissonant are to be rejected, but what are neither consonant nor dissonant, in those things the rule concerning things indifferent is to be observed; viz. that first it may be free to the Churches, either to admit or not to admit them; and secondly, that if they do admit them, they admit onely those that make for edification, and order, and decency in the Church: and lastly, let them declare that
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the consciences of Christians are not so obliged by observing of them, as by observing the Commands of God; for that the consciences of Christians are bound *per se* and *semper* only by the Word of God. Churches ought to be free in things indifferent, *v. z.* in those things that have no testimony in the Word of God. But yet those things which are certainly known by approved Authors to have had a place in the Catholique Church, either alway, or for the most part, even from the very beginning of the Church, by the consent of all Churches, I say, it is not the part of a Christian, or one that fears God, to reject those things, and banish them out of the Church, without just and necessary causes taken from the Word of God, and if it may be, explained in, and approved by a generall and Christian Councill.

On the other side: Those things also, which though they be neither in their own nature evil, nor have unprofitably been for a long time superstitions and idolatries, I say, to be unwilling, either after the example of *Hezekiah* and *Iosiah*, wholly to remove them, or at least, after the example of other pious Kings, so to mend and purge them, as that all idolatry and superstition, & all occasion of idolatry and superstition may be taken away, is a piece of pertinacy by no means to be allowed of.

In sum; Councils are called that Churches may be reformed; Churches are to be reformed by the best form: A better form cannot be found or invented then that, according to which Christ by himself and his Apostles did at first constitute and form his Church. What that form of the ancient and Apostolicall Church was in the time of Christ and his Apostles, it clearly and evidently appears out of the books of the Evangelists and Apostles, and probably out of the most ancient Ecclesiastical Writers after the Apostles: Therefore all Churches are to be reformed in doctrine, in worship, and in ceremonies, and disciplines, especially according to that form of the Church, which is delivered in the Bible, and chiefly in the books of the new Testament; and then according to that form that appears in the ancientest Writers, as much as may be, *i. e.* as far as this doth not crosse the former; so that all things may be brought back to their first principles and spring heads; or so far, that having banished all novell doctrines, doctrines and worships unheard of and unknown by the Apostles and Apostolical Fathers, all old things, *viz.* the ancient doctrine, ancient worship, ancient ceremonies, and ancient discipline may be called back again into the Church; so the Lord by the Prophet *Isaiah*, *c. x.* promising a reformation of the whole Church, and whole City of *Ierusalem*, saith, *I will*

will purge away all thy dross, and take away all thy tin; and I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy Counsellors as at the beginning; Afterward thou shalt be called the City of Righteousness, the faithful City. Therefore all the tin of new doctrines and new worships is to be taken away, and that doctrine and that worship is to be restored which was from the beginning, viz. In the times of the Apostles and Apostolical men. The Lord also commands thus by the mouth of *Jeremy*, saying Thus saith the Lord, *Stand in the wayes and look about you, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, walk therein and you shall find rest for your souls.* Our Saviour also *Mat. 19.* being about to reform marriage, he called back the Jews to the first institution of marriage, saying, *but from the beginning it was not so;* There are certainly innumerable things in the Church which were not so from the beginning, sc. in the times of the Apostles. Therefore all Churches are to be reformed according to the form of the antient and Apostolical Church, and all things as well worship and discipline as opinions are to be examined, not by the *Lesbian* rule of mans judgement but the touchstone of the word of God.

Thus in few words you have my opinion concerning the chief and true way of reforming Churches, viz. concerning the rule by which all things to be debated, or in a Synod ought to be examined. But as for the other, viz. the lawful form of holding a councell, &c. I must another time,

F I N I S.
